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SOME FEATURES OF THE SUPERNATURAL AS REPRESENTED IN PLAYS OF THE REIGNS OF ELIZABETH AND JAMES.

IN the following paper it is my purpose to set forth three series of Elizabethan plays, the content of which involves a more or less frank acceptance and presentation on the stage of the supernatural agencies known as devils, fairies, and witches. In this place I am less concerned with the sources of this folk-lore, whether popular or literary, than with the nature of its manifestation in these plays, and their relations, one to the others. The angels and devils of the old sacred drama are anterior, the ghosts and furies of Senecan tragedy for the most part extraneous, to the action. The part which the disembodied spirit, returning to the haunts of men, was destined to play in later tragedy deserves a careful and serious consideration for its frequent manifestation of art as well as for its interesting psychology. This theme in its growth and change of treatment marks the distance traversed from the ghost of Andrea, attended by Revenge, in a supererogatory prologue, to "the majesty of buried Denmark" stalking across the platform at Elsinore, the miraculous and blood-curdling echo in *The Duchess of Malfi*, or the dagger proffered to Macbeth, that shadowy figment of a wicked and over-wrought imagination.¹ With none of these interesting matters shall I at present deal. The sorcerers and wizards, too, such as Sacrapant the conjurer, son of the witch Meroë, who summons furies amid thunder and lightning to do his bidding; or Bryan Sansfoy, the guardian of a flying serpent in the Forest of Marvels, a coward and enchanter, holding knights and damsels in thrall, like Spenser's Archimago—of such as these I shall not treat.² For these magicians of old romance are little more than stock figures, and while they certainly affected later conceptions of the kind, really belong to mediæval times and

¹ See *The Spanish Tragedy*, Prologue; *Hamlet*, I, i; *The Duchess of Malfi*, V, i; *Macbeth*, II, i.

² *The Old Wives' Tale*, BULLEN'S *Peele*, Vol. I, p. 321; *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamyes*, *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 126; *The Fairy Queen*, Book I.

to Europe at large, and are negligible in a consideration of English creatures of the supernatural as conceived in the reigns of Elizabeth and James. It may be remarked that the greatest of the magicians of this old mediæval type is of course Merlin, who figures so extensively in that curious mixture of legendary story, romantic drama, and gross *diablerie*, *The Birth of Merlin*.¹ In it, besides much else, are depicted the miraculous birth and the strange prophecies of that remarkable wizard; his raising and laying of spirits and demons, among them his father, the devil; the appearance of the worthies Hector and Achilles, conjured hence by magic, as are Goddess Lucina, the Fates, and even the abstraction Death.

The Elizabethan attitude towards the world that lies beyond, push forward the barriers of human knowledge as we may, was very different from our own. Before what Arthur Hugh Clough wittily called "the Supreme Bifurcation," the Elizabethan never paused in modern puzzled, agnostic doubt, but confidently chose his horn of the dilemma and cheerfully suffered his tossing or going as the case might be. Astrologers, alchemists, and wise-women flourished and grew rich on the ignorance and credulity of their dupes; tellers of fortunes, mixers of philters, finders of hidden treasure and lost articles by divination prospered alike. Many, like Owen Glendower, could "call spirits from the vasty deep," and "command the devil;" and few there were, like Hotspur, to question, "Will they come when you do call for them?"² Nor were these superstitions confined to the ignorant and the vulgar. The Earl of Leicester consulted the celebrated astrologer Doctor Dee as to the auspicious day on which to hold the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.³ Excellent Reginald Scot, although he humanely wrote a very long book to display the shallowness of the evidence on which witches were convicted, did not venture to deny the existence of witchcraft.⁴ Even Lord Bacon, who incredulously doubted the Copernican system of astronomy, shared with his royal master King James a belief in many of

¹ First printed in 1662 as "written by William Shakespeare and William Rowley," and not improbably the *Uther Pendragon* of 1597.

² *1 Henry IV*, III, i.

³ *Dictionary of National Biography*, article "Dee," Vol. XIV, p. 271.

⁴ *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), ed. 1886, pp. 407 ff.

the popular superstitions of his day.¹ In an environment such as this the supernatural as a dramatic motive may be assumed to have had a sanction and a potency well nigh inconceivable today.

The supernatural first entered the English drama as an artistic motive with the advent of *Faustus*. Of the origins of this world-story, of Marlowe's immediate source and the probable date of the earliest performance of his well known play there is no need here to speak. "Of all that [Marlowe] hath written for the stage," wrote Edward Philips, "his Doctor Faustus hath made the greatest noise."² And its many editions and alterations for revival point to its having been one of the most popular dramas of its day. As we have it *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* is little more than a succession of scenes void of continuity or cohesion except for the unity of the main figure and the unrelenting progress of the whole towards the overwhelming catastrophe. Moreover this fragment—for the play is little more—is disfigured and disgraced by the interpolation of scenes of clownage and ribaldry which, in view of the strictures enunciated in the famous prologue of *Tamburlaine* as to "such conceits as clownage keeps in pay," and the apology of the printer in the Preface of that play, it is impossible to believe that Marlowe wrote. And yet, broken torso that it is, there is a grandeur beyond mere description in this conception of the lonely, grace-abandoned scholar, in whom the promptings of remorse alone betray the touch of human weakness, whose inordinate desire for power and knowledge, rather than mere gratification of appetite, have impelled to the signing of his terrible compact with the Evil One, and whose mortal agonies have in them a dignity which not even the mediæval conception of hoofed and horned deviltry could destroy. Perilous is the practice of the art of comparison, and yet, when all has been said, there remains an impassioned reserve, a sense of mastery and a poignancy of feeling about this battered fragment of the old Elizabethan age that I find not in the grotesque Teutonic *diablerie*, the symbolical æsthetics, even in the consummate art, wisdom, and philosophy of Goethe's *Faust*.

¹ See *Sylva Sylvarum*, *passim*.

² *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675), ed. 1800, p. 113. *Faustus* was almost certainly on the stage in 1588.

The story of Faustus, with its conjuring of demons, its infernal compact, the alternate promptings of the good and bad angel, and its appalling catastrophe, is a mediæval story of black art. There seems little reason to doubt that the "white magic" of the English Friar Bacon was worked into his romantic drama, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, by Robert Greene in direct emulation of the foreign black magic of Marlowe's *Faustus*.¹ The romantic part of Greene's engaging play tells of the love of Prince Edward for the Fair Maid of Fressingfield, a keeper's daughter, with the fair maid's anticipation of the rôle of Priscilla in *The Courtship of Miles Standish* in favor of her lover Lacey, Earl of Lincoln. But with this is united a tale of the magical doings of Friar Bacon—how he created by his art a brazen head that spoke and would have walled all England with brass but for the stupidity of a servant, how he could show the acts of people afar off in his "prosecutive stone" of crystal, and obliterate both time and space—for such was the myth which had grown out of the life and reputed studies of that remarkable man, Roger Bacon.

The story of Faustus revolves about the daring compact with the father of evil and its terrible fruit; the characters, save for the writhing and tortured protagonist and the supernatural ministers to his ambition and his fate, seem thin and unreal, as the daylight seems unreal after a night of fever and anguish. Friar Bacon, on the contrary, is a goodnatured and patriotic wizard, solicitous for the happiness and the good of others, alive in fresh and merry England; and although the shadow of his intercourse with hell hangs over him, a misadventure, for which his art is only indirectly responsible, brings him to repentance and the renouncement of his traffic with evil. A novel feature of the story (in the original tale as in the play) is the necromantic contest in which Friar Bacon worsts Vandermast, a rival magician, and has him transported to his native Germany on the back of a simulacrum of Hercules.² It was this feature of the contest that Anthony Munday imitated in his *John a Kent and John a Cumber*,

¹ On this topic see A. W. WARD, Introduction to his edition of these two plays (1892), p. i. *Friar Bacon* was first acted in 1589, and must have followed hard upon *Faustus*.

² *Friar Bacon*, Scene ix.

1594,¹ a diverting comedy of situation in which the two wizards who give title to the play are pitted against each other in an elaborate exhibition of their supernatural powers, in process of which disguises, exchanges of person, "errors," and "antiques" figure in bewildering confusion. Munday's play is doubtless original, although his heroine, Sedanen, was known to the popular ballads of the day, and John a Kent appears to have been an actual person living near Hereford at some remote and indeterminate period, and enjoying the reputation of having sold himself to the devil, like Faustus.

The infernal compact appears once more in the pleasing anonymous comedy of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, 1606; but Peter Fabel, the English Faustus, after exercising his art on the devil to cheat him into a seven years' prolongation of his time on earth,² like Bacon and John a Kent, employs his powers to unite faithful lovers, and the supernatural ceases to be an element in the story. A remarkable application of the infernal compact to an historical subject is *The Devil's Charter, or a Tragedy Containing the Life and Death of Pope Alexander VI*, acted by the king's company in 1606, and the work of Barnaby Barnes, the lyricist, who is not otherwise known to the history of the drama.³ Alexander's wicked and abandoned life and the marvelous success of his worldly career, crowned with the papacy, gave rise almost immediately upon his death to stories in which he was transmuted in the popular imagination into a species of pontifical Faustus. Nor did the Protestant zeal of succeeding times neglect an example at once so flagrant and so apt. Barnes's tragedy is full of horror and novel situation, and owes not a little to the study of Marlowe's *Faustus*. A fine and original climax is produced when the wicked Pope, about to die, drags himself from his couch that he may sit once more in the seat of St. Peter and feel the triple tiara on his brow. With faltering steps and eager, trembling hands, he approaches the curtain which veils the papal chair. He draws it and starts back, for there, arrayed in all the regalia of priestly pomp, crowned

¹ *Publications of the Shakespeare Society* (1851). It is not impossible that a lost play called *Scogan and Skelton*, by HATHWAY AND RANKINS, 1601, represented a similar necromantic contest.—*Henslowe's Diary*, p. 175.

² See the opening scene.

³ This interesting play has not been reprinted.

and occupying St. Peter's throne, sits Satan himself. Had the younger author known when to stay his hand, and had he been somewhat more of a practical playwright, this tragedy might not have been an altogether unworthy successor of its illustrious prototype.

Closely allied to these dramas in which supernatural powers are derived by a magician from the pledging of his soul are the several plays which represent the devil in human guise and familiar intercourse with mortals, to their undoing, or satirically to the worsting of the devil. Henslowe records a production, the work of Day and Haughton, entitled *Friar Rush and the Proud Woman of Amsterdam*.¹ Friar Rush is well known in continental folklore as the devil disguised as a cook who corrupts a whole monastery with delicious fare. As a prose tale Friar Rush had already appeared in England as early as 1568. And although no known version contains allusion to the woman of Amsterdam, several of the friar's well known exploits may well have been transferred to the Flemish capital.² It was not until 1610 that Dekker produced his extraordinary dramatic development of the story of Friar Rush, *If This Be Not a Good Play the Devil is in It*. This play represents the mission of three devils sent by the infernal council to earth, one of whom, Ruffman, practices on the virtuous court of Naples, a second, Lurchall, on a hitherto upright merchant, the third, Friar Rush, on a monastery renowned for the austerity of its rule. The demons succeed in bringing all save a steadfast sub-prior to the verge of ruin; and the play ends with a realistic representation of the tortures of the villainous merchant Barter-vile, in company with such sensational contemporary malefactors as Ravailac and Guy Fawkes. Dekker's play was hastily written and is confused in places in its design, and grotesque alike for the vulgar excess of its *diablerie* and for its transference to modern times of a story incongruous when deprived of its fitting mediæval setting. And yet *If This Be Not a Good Play* can not but be regarded as a very remarkable effort for the boldness of its plan, the comprehensiveness of its scope, and the surprising anticipation

¹ *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 193.

² HERFORD, *Literary Relations of England and Germany* (1886), p. 308.

which it offers of Goethe's *Faust* in its "recasting of an old devil story in terms of modern society."¹

Dekker's play has no relation whatever to Macchiavelli's *jeu d'esprit* on the marriage of Belphegor, although a superficial resemblance was noted by Langbaine, and this suggestion has misled some later writers.² Macchiavelli's *novella* is, however, the direct source of the main plot of *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, the printed title of which is derived from the underplot in which an inferior demon disguised as Robin Goodfellow figures in a farcical rôle. The major plot details how a suicide, Spenser's Malbecco,³ pleading before the infernal judges that he was driven in desperation to his crime by the outrageous wickedness of his wife, is reprieved for a year and a day, while the devil, Belphegor, is dispatched to earth to observe if womankind is really so desperately depraved as reported.⁴ Belphegor plans to marry one woman, and is duped into marriage with another. Both men and women prove to be more than a match in ingenuity and wickedness for the unhappy devil; and in the end, buffeted and outwitted, poisoned by his wife, and waylaid by her paramour, he is only saved from the gallows on a false accusation of murder by the timely expiration of his term on earth. St. Dunstan appears in this play, as in one or two others, as from his wisdom and sanctity a controller of evil; but he never rises to the dignity of a magician.⁵

In the year of Shakespeare's death, 1616, and after the appearance of the first folio of Jonson's works, the latter poet produced a comedy of devil-lore, confessedly to rival Dekker's *If It Be Not a Good Play* and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. Moreover, while *The Devil Is an Ass* is conceived with a measure of that bold originality and mingling of minute realism with fanciful invention which is, in stronger degree elsewhere, Jonson's, *The Marriage of Belphegor* must certainly have suggested to the

¹ HERFORD, *Literary Relations of England and Germany* (1886), p. 317.

² *An Account of English Dramatic Poets* (1691), p. 122; HALLIWELL-PHILLIPS, *A Dictionary of Old Plays* (1870), p. 124.

³ *The Fairy Queen*, Book III, cantos 9 and 10.

⁴ DODSLEY, *Old Plays*, ed. 1874, Vol. VIII, pp. 393 ff.

⁵ See especially *A Knack to Know a Knave*, *ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 503.

English dramatist his general design. Pug, the lesser devil, out of a childlike curiosity and ambition to extend the dominion of hell, seeks the world for one day in the face of dissuasive advice of the more experienced great devil, Satan. In the body of a lately hanged cutpurse and in clothes stolen from a servant Pug seeks employment of a rich old fool and makes a few abortive advances to intimacy with mankind. But he is repulsed, beaten, and cheated at every turn, and in the end escapes being whipped to Tyburn at the tail of a cart for the theft of the suit of clothes he wears only by reason of the expiration of his day on earth. It is a far cry from the dignity and overpowering terror of the conception of Faustus to pitiful Pug on his knees to his master, who will not believe him to be a real devil, although honestly assured of the fact; or sighing in Newgate for midnight to set him free from his chains and restore to him "his holidays in hell."¹

Turning back to the latter days of Queen Elizabeth, in Dekker's loosely constructed but poetical comedy of *Old Fortunatus*, printed in 1600, we find a tale of folk-lore very different in its original intent from *Faustus*, and yet strongly affected by that tragedy. There is reason to believe that Dekker's play as we have it is the result of the revision of a comedy dealing with Fortunatus and his inexhaustible purse, well known to the stage as early as February, 1596. Whether this "first part" was Dekker's or another's, that dramatist revised the whole work, probably adding the adventures of the sons of Fortunatus in November, 1599; and, the play being unexpectedly ordered for court, further added the poetical masque-like scenes which depict the strife of Vice and Virtue, later in the same year.² In Dekker's hands the old fairy tale of the gift of Fortune and the wishing-cap, which carries its wearer whither he will, is transmuted from its original frank worldliness into a theme of moral gravity by the allegorical contention of Virtue and Vice and by the emphasis which is laid on the folly of Fortunatus in his choice of wealth, with the discord and doom which its inheritance entails

¹ Jonson, ed. CUNNINGHAM (1875), Vol. V, pp. 132, 135.

² Henslowe's *Diary*, pp. 64, 159, 161.

on his sons. Could Dekker have written always as he wrote in the best scenes of this beautiful play, he could well challenge a place beside the greatest poets of his age.

"There were no real fairies before Shakespeare's," says Dr. Furness. "What were called 'fairies' have existed ever since stories were told to wide-eyed listeners round a winter's fire. But these are not the fairies of Shakespeare, nor the fairies of to-day. They are the fairies of Grimm's Mythology. Our fairies are spirits of another sort, but unless they wear Shakespeare's livery they are counterfeit."¹ The absolute truth of this statement must appear to anyone who will be at the pains to turn to the innumerable "sources" of Shakespeare's fairy-lore which the indefatigable industry of commentators has unearthed and suggested. Oberon, the *deus ex machina* of the old romance of *Huon of Bordeaux*, although he possesses some of the features of Shakespeare's fairy king, is a dwarf and a mortal;² his namesake in Greene's drama on King James IV is little more than the presenter of a series of dumb shows and the coryphæus of a "round" of fairies, who dance jigs and hornpipes wholly extraneous to the action of the play.³ And a perusal of *The Fairy Queen* which had stopped well short of the third book could alone have misled anyone into the supposition that the Elfe and Fay, "of whom all faeryes spring and fetch their lignage," have anything in common with Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed.⁴ Shakespeare refined the elves and goblins of folk-lore to a diminutiveness and daintiness beyond the reach of the gross imaginations of the countryside, as he transmuted the fays of the bookish lands of "faerie" into a charming and fanciful reality. Robin Goodfellow and Queen Mab meet without incongruity, and Puck and the gossamer-winged attendants on Bottom shade imperceptibly into the airy tenants of the exuberant fancy of Mercutio and the haunting music and invisible spells of the *Tempest*.

¹ *Variorum Shakespeare*, Vol. X, p. xxiv.

² See *Huon of Bordeaux*, ed. Early English Text Society (1882), pp. 60, 267.

³ *The Scottish History of King James IV*, GROSART's *Greene*, Vol. XIII, pp. 205 ff.

⁴ *Fairy Queen*, Book II, canto 10, ll. 631 ff.

A Midsummer Night's Dream produced a profound impression on the poetic imagination of its day, and thenceforth (to say nothing of non-dramatic productions such as Drayton's *Nymphidia* and the fairy-lore of the pastoralists) scenes introducing elves and fairies enter not infrequently into the popular plays as well as into the performances at court. Thus in the confused romantic comedy of intrigue, *The Wisdom of Doctor Dodipol*, which must have been written very soon after Shakespeare's play, fairies usher in a banquet and an enchanter exercises spells on wood-wandering lovers not dissimilar to those of Puck. In *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, printed in 1600, the fairy element also obtrudes in several very pretty songs,¹ although the play is of a pastoral and mythological cast in the manner of Lyly and was formerly inaccurately ascribed to him. Even into the midst of so melodramatic a performance as the quasi-historical tragedy *Lust's Dominion* Oberon and his fairy rout are lugged to warn a character of her impending death.² Shakespeare employed mock fairies in the delightful masquerade which brings about at once the punishment of Falstaff and the *dénouement* of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*;³ while later far, in 1610, the dainty fairy-lore of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* expands into the imaginative world of the supernatural which girdles the enchanted island of Prospero, a world wherein the romantic and the grotesque, ethereal spirit and mortality in its nobility and in its sensual grossness unite in a perfect harmony with which only Shakespeare could have infused such discordant materials.⁴

But Shakespeare's poetic and fanciful transfiguration of popular fairy-lore was not the only literary and dramatic treatment of the fairies of his age. The diligent researches into primitive and bookish mythology so confidently applied to Shakespeare's free creations of the supernatural world are far more significant and fruitful when applied to the fairies of Ben Jonson; and here, as elsewhere, that learned man and poet of a wholly admirable talent stands in striking contrast to the brilliant, imaginative, and all-

¹ BULLEN, *Old English Plays* (1884), Vol. III, p. 135; and *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 127.

² This play may have been written as early as 1600; the passage alluded to is Act III, scene 2.

³ V, v, 41 ff.

⁴ See *Tempest*.

conquering genius of him who alone of all Jonson's contemporaries could equal and surpass him. Jonson's contributions to fairy-lore in dramatic form are included in *The Satyr*, "a particular entertainment of the Queen and Prince at Althorpe . . . 1603, as they came first into the Kingdom;" *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, a Masque of Prince Henry's, 1610; and the character of Puck in *The Sad Shepherd*.¹ Jonson's fairies, like the Irish "other people," do not seem to have been conspicuously distinguishable for their small size;² and, as might be expected from their employment in masques, like those of Greene, are notable for their dancing, and to this they add a very pretty quality in song.³ Jonson's Puck is no "merry wanderer of the night," but is sur-named "Hairy" and debased to attendance on the Witch of Pap-lewick; whilst to Queen Mab, in vast discrepancy to the delicate and pampered royalty of Titania, are ascribed the tricky pranks of will-o'-the-wisp, moon-calf, and household elf. It was reserved in much later times to Jonson's witty, reckless, and godless "son," Thomas Randolph, to laugh the fairies off the stage. In his fine pastoral drama *Amyntas*, published in 1638, Randolph employs a mock fairy *motif* to enhance the lighter comedy scenes of his play. In the course of it Jocastus, a fantastic shepherd and "fairy knight," and Mopsus, a foolish augur, carry on much satirical discourse concerning fairies and fairy-lore; and in the end contrive to rob an orchard by means of a "bevy of fairies" who for some reason best known to their author sing, though prettily, only in Latin. Told to "go love some fairy lady," Mopsus replies:

How, Jocastus,
Marry a puppet? wed a mote i' th' sun?
Go look a wife in nutshells? Woo a gnat,
That's nothing but a voice? No, no, Jocastus,
I must have flesh and blood, . . .
A fig for fairies!⁴

The fairies dwell in pleasant regions of fancy and their drama is comedy. Witchcraft in its grotesqueness, its horror, and its

¹ Various dates between 1618 and the thirties.

² The "lesser faies" of *Oberon* were represented by noble children; the greater hence, presumably, by adults.

³ See especially the songs in *Oberon*.

⁴ "Amyntas, or the Impossible Dowry," *Works of Randolph* (1875), Vol. I, p. 278; and see also pp. 279-84, 346, 325-31, 364.

pathos occupies, as has well been said, "a field debateable, in a way unparalleled between tragedy and comedy."¹ In a sermon preached before the queen in 1572, John Jewell, wise and pious bishop that he was, declared:

Witches and sorcerers, within these last few yeeres, are marvellously increased within this your Grace's realme. These eies have seene most evident and manifest marks of their wickedness. . . . Wherefore, your poore subjects most humble petition unto your Highnesse, is that the laws touching such malefactors, may be put in due execution.²

This may be taken as a measure of the popular belief in witchcraft, which among the political and religious difficulties that beset the reigns of the later Tudors, from a harmless white magic, useful for the discovery of things lost, for the mixture of love philters, or for effecting simple cures, came to be regarded as a dreadful and alarming evil, spreading like the plague and blasting with death in this world and with damnation in the world to come the unhappy creatures who fell under suspicion of traffic in it. To the Elizabethan playgoer the apparition of Mephistophilis to Faustus or the conjurings of the wizard, Bolingbroke, and Margery Jourdain,³ dealers in the supernatural in *2 Henry VI*, seemed the natural representation of things universally known to be true; and the extraordinary reversal of the military successes of Henry V and of Talbot by the French, a foe habitually despised and beaten, could be accounted for in no other wise than by the acceptance of the English tradition that Joan of Arc had been justly tried and burnt for a witch.⁴

The plays of the age of Elizabeth are full of allusion to these popular superstitions, from the allegorical representation of the practices against Elizabeth's life in a work of Dekker,⁵ to the farcical situation of Falstaff, disguised as the Wise Woman of Brentford.⁶ But it was not until King James ascended the throne and gave to the popular belief in witchcraft the sanction of the royal opinion, that the witch, as such, enters as a motive into the fabric of English plays. Heywood, Shakespeare, Dekker, Middleton, and Ford, all deal with witchcraft; imaginatively, realistically,

¹ A. W. WARD, *History of Dramatic Literature* (1899), Vol. II, p. 367.

² Quoted in SCOT, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Introduction, p. xxxii.

³ II, iv. ⁴ *1 Henry VI*, V, iii. ⁵ *The Whore of Babylon* (1604). ⁶ *Merry Wives*, IV, ii.

jocularly, pathetically, in only one case—Heywood's *Wise Woman of Hogsdon*—in the least skeptically.¹ Jonson, who repudiated and satirized the followers of alchemy and astrology, hesitated to attack the more terrible superstitions of witchcraft, but represents his witches in *The Masque of Queens*, 1609, with a circumstantial attention to every coarse and unseemly detail and a display of erudition, classic and modern, which must have delighted the grossness and pedantry alike of the royal author of a treatise on demonology.

The witches of *Macbeth* preceded as they surpassed all other representation of their kind on the stage: for the little that went before Lyly's *Mother Bombie*² and the examples already cited, were neither vital nor closely interwoven in the tissues of the play. But despite the fidelity with which Shakespeare followed his source, as was his wont, and notwithstanding a certain incongruity which the supererogatory queen of witches Hecate brings into the imaginative conception of the three Weird Sisters, the witches of *Macbeth* rise so far above the wretched hags and obscene *succubae* of popular demonology, so ally themselves on the one hand with the cosmic forces of nature and so vividly represent the visible symbolical form of subjective human depravity on the other, that they, no more than Shakespeare's fairies, can be accepted as really illustrative of the popular belief of the time.

For the popular dramatic exposition of witchcraft we must then turn to other authors. Jonson's *Witch of Papplewick* is possessed of most of the malignant and repulsive features of her kind. She assumes the shape of a raven and again of innocent Maid Marian, to foment mischief. She is hunted at full cry by a band of huntsmen who mistake her for a hare, and is about to be represented "with her spells, threds and images," when Jonson's fragment abruptly comes to an end.³ Even more repulsively realistic are the hags who enact the antimasque of *The Masque of*

¹ The *Wise Woman of Hogsdon* is little more than a female quack doctor. See an interesting passage on the "wise women" of the time, II, i. *Heywood's Dramatic Works* (1874), Vol. V, p. 292.

² First printed in 1594; *Macbeth* is usually dated about 1606.

³ *The Sad Shepherd*, III, ii; CUNNINGHAM, *Jonson*, Vol. VI, p. 283.

Queens already mentioned above. These witches are described as issuing "with a kind of hollow and infernal music" from "an ugly hell," "all differently attired, some with rats on their head, some on their shoulders; others with ointment-pots at their girdles; all with spindles, timbrels, rattles, or other venefical instruments, making a confused noise, with strange gestures." Amid charms and incantations admirable for their grotesque and gruesome horror and suggestiveness, the "Dame" or queen of witches enters, "naked-armed, bare-footed, her frock tucked, her hair knotted and folded with vipers; in her hands a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted, girded with a snake;" and the roll is called, the witches responding to such names as Credulity, Impudence, Slander, Bitterness, Rage, and other abstractions.¹

In *The Witch*, by Thomas Middleton (of uncertain date, but assuredly written after *Macbeth*), that ready playwright grafted on a romantic tale of Belleforest a story of witchcraft derived through Scot's *Discoverie* from Nider's *Formicarius*,² a work written in Latin by a German. The original version of this latter story concerns the unholy doings of three wizards and their successive practices in their craft. Middleton, with a dramatist's instinct, changed their sex, united their adventures, and linked them with the witchcrone of antiquity by naming one of their number Hecate, besides giving to their incantations an influential part in determining the course of the play. The witch name Hecate thus occurs in both Shakespeare's and Middleton's play; and likenesses of phrase have been discovered in the witch scenes of the two dramas, radically different as the governing conceptions of these ministers of evil appear in the two productions. Moreover it has been thought that the extraneousness and contradictory nature of Shakespeare's Hecate as compared with her sister witches is to be explained by assuming an interpolation by Middleton or another hand in a play originally free from this and other like blemishes.³ Be all this as it may, the last word has been said on this comparison by Charles Lamb, in a passage which quotation can never stale:

¹ See *ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 108, 112.

² See HERFORD, *Literary Relations of England and Germany*, p. 233. Book V of the *Formicarius* treats "De Maleficis," etc.

³ On this whole subject, see FURNESS, *Variorum ed. of Macbeth*, p. 388.

[Shakespeare's] witches [he tells us] are distinguished from the witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first met with Macbeth's, he is spellbound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These witches can hurt the body: those have power over the soul. Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon: the hags of Shakespeare have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them. Except Hecate they have no names: which heightens their mysteriousness. Their names, and some of the properties which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, 'like a thick scurf o'er life.'¹

There remain two remarkable plays in which English witchcraft is sketched from life. Their treatment in this place neither their late date nor the realism which allies them with the domestic drama whose theme is every-day life could excuse, were it not for the presence in both of a certain element of the grotesqueness and wonder and the humane spirit that suggests, even if it does not portray the pathos of the situation of these unhappy traffickers in evil. *The Witch of Edmonton* was most likely first acted towards the end of the reign of King James, and is assigned on its title page to the "well esteemed poets, William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, etc." The play is grounded on a prose account of one Elizabeth Sawyer of Islington, who was executed in 1621 for witchcraft; and belongs in its general theme to the interesting series of tragedies dealing with domestic unhappiness and consequent crime. Mother Sawyer, a wretched and poverty-stricken old woman, is driven to commerce with the supernatural in revenge for outrageous and wanton ill treatment on the part of her neighbors. A devil in shape of a black dog surprises her in one of her paroxysms of impotent cursing, exacts from her the usual pledge of her soul, and becomes her

¹ *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (ed. 1893), Vol. I, p. 271.

“familiar.”¹ Her feud with the neighborhood continues until, deserted by her evil spirit, her hut is set afire and she is arraigned and convicted of her many acts of spite and mischief. Forbiddingly coarse as are many of the details of this story of vulgar witchcraft, the character of Mother Sawyer is conceived with a sympathy for the miserable old hag, with a touch of pathos and an apprehension of the moral responsibility of her persecutors which is surprising in view of the circumstance that neither her actual possession by her grotesque familiar spirit nor the supernatural quality of her traffic is called into question for a moment.

The Late Lancashire Witches was printed in 1634 as the work of Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome,² its source the notorious trials for witchcraft of 1633 in the county named. Indeed, to judge from the epilogue, the composition of this play must have followed so close on the events that its influence in forestalling the judgment of the courts which tried these unfortunate creatures can scarcely be considered negligible. Attention has been called to the repetition of a familiar *motif* of Heywood's in the main event of *The Lancashire Witches*. Like Mistress Franklin, the woman killed with kindness, like Wincott's wife in *The English Traveller*, Mistress Generous, the wife of an honorable man, is led astray, here not by an earthly lover, but by the powers of darkness to which she pledges her soul and becomes a witch. In the other two plays the erring wife is magnanimously, even tenderly, treated; here the enormity of the crime demanded another *dénouement*. *The Lancashire Witches* is a mine of current witch-lore, with its transformations of supposedly respectable housewives into midnight hags and thence into cats or supernatural jades that traverse miraculous distances, with its grotesque malice, unhallowed revels and wanton breeding of strife. The pathos is not for the witches, but for the upright husband deceived by his witch-wife, whose repentance is feigned. At length she is discovered by the loss of her hand in one of her midnight escapades while transformed into the shape of a cat; and she is delivered over to justice by her sorrowful and offended lord,

¹ *The Witch of Edmonton*, II, i.

² *Dramatic Works of Heywood* (1874), Vol. IV, pp. 167-262.

but without a qualm of conscience as to the rectitude of his act. *The Lancashire Witches* is an excellent example of the journalist's instinct that sees and instantly appropriates to present use material of current interest. It is terrible to think that the fate of some of the unfortunate thousands that perished in the seventeenth century accused of these loathsome and impossible crimes may have hung on the reception of this circumstantial representation of their alleged misdeeds on the popular stage.

The dreadful compact of Faustus and the pleasing white magic of Friar Bacon were succeeded by the *diablerie* of Grim the Collier and Friar Rush, and by the savage irony of *The Devil is an Ass*. The terpsichorean fairies of Jonson's masques followed the poetical and fanciful sprites of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to be followed in turn by the satiric elves of Randolph. In each of these cases the general absorption of the supernatural as a motive in Elizabethan drama is satirical; and satire and romance are things absolutely alien and incompatible. With witchcraft the tale is different. From a vague and indefinable element of the preternatural in the wizards of old romance, this *motif* dilated under the hand of Shakespeare into the mysterious horror and spiritual terror which the doings and the prophecies of the witches in *Macbeth* inspire; only to dwindle through Middleton's half successful imitation of the Weird Sisters, and through the grotesque hags of Jonson's masques to compassion for the maunderings of Mother Sawyer and contempt for the lewd gambols and physical transformations of Mall Spencer and Mistress Generous, the Lancashire witches.

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